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ABSTRACT

Discussed is the role of the parent of the gifted preschool child, and described is a parent group based on the philosophy that home, school, and community should work together in the education of the gifted child. It is explained that the program focused on self concepts of parent and child, characteristics of gifted children, opportunity for sharing among parents, the use of community resource personnel, and the importance of the gifted child's environment. (DB)

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PARENT EDUCATION FOR GIFTED PRE-SCHOOLERS

Patricia L. Dwinell

"Do you have some more books on space? I've read all of these."

"Nobody at this school knows anything."

Such statements may not be so unusual, but when they come from children of 3 to 5 years of age, it is not surprising that the parents may feel a need to cry "Help!"

A survey of questions asked by parents who call the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Georgia has revealed that many parents are concerned when their children exhibit behavior which is precocious or, at least, above average.

In all cases, the parents requested information which would help them in understanding their child and provide them with activities which would aid in the development of the child.

Being a parent of a gifted child can be a most frustrating and lonely job. Every parent sometimes needs emotional support and/or guidance, but for the parent of the gifted child it is often most difficult to get this support. For example, if the parent wishes to discuss his child with friends and neighbors he runs the risk of being accused of bragging. Suspicion, fear, and perhaps rejection may result.

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Parents of the gifted need a safe, responsive environment in which they can discuss their fears, concerns, problems, joys and successes. Because of the mobile nature of our society, often there is not present the supporting adult such as a doting grandmother or an understanding uncle. For these and many other reasons, they need interaction with other adults who will have some of the same concerns regarding their gifted children. A group comprised of parents of gifted children can often provide for each other the supportive environment that is needed.

The parents of the gifted child are the most important persons in the life of the child. They are the first teachers. They provide the home environment which will largely determine the course of the child's development. According to Brumbaugh and Roshco (1959), the role parents play in the child's development may often make the difference between full growth of a child's abilities and only mediocre performance.

Most important to the gifted child is the proper emotional atmosphere. Other inadequacies can often be overcome if he lives in a happy, responsive household (Brumbaugh and Roshco, 1959). The gifted child has the same emotional needs as other children. He needs to be loved first for what he is rather than for his achievements (Bledsoe, 1973). Parents can show respect for the child's individual needs, ideas, and development by avoiding criticism, idea-killing comments, and uninterested behavior--either verbal or non-verbal.

The gifted child knows he is different. He especially needs sympathetic and understanding parents who can provide the proper

atmosphere in which the child can freely express his ideas and feelings and develop his special abilities.

The parents also assist in the intellectual and creative development of the child by being a good model. It is not necessary that they be highly educated to assert a favorable influence on the child's intellectual growth. The home encourages learning and questioning when children are surrounded by good books and permitted to experiment in science, dramatics, writing, art, and other hobby interests. This helps children advance on their way to independent and creative thinking (Hildreth, 1966).

Sometimes parents of gifted children go to extremes in handling their children -- they either belittle or neglect the child and laugh at him or exploit the child and push him beyond normal limits (Hildreth, 1966).

However, the gifted child is still a child with the same basic needs as other children. He needs freedom and independence as well as guidance and controls. He often needs time and a quiet place to be alone -- to wonder, engage in reflective thought, and to appreciate the world around him. The parent of the gifted child needs to know when to let go. They can provide materials, knowledge of basic skills, and support but must leave room for the imagination to flourish, the brain to function, and experience and growth to develop.

According to Khatena (1974, p. 202) parents can be the

> "Most potent lead to the child's
> attempts to realize his full potential."

The parent can encourage the gifted child to appreciate new and varied

experiences and to help him extend his imagination by seeing relationships in new and unusual ways.

The gifted child's mind will range farther and faster than that of the average child. He needs to be taught how to use this superior mental functioning most effectively (Brumbaugh and Roshco, 1959). Parents can help in training the mind by playing mental games with the child, by helping the child acquire the skills of asking questions which will enable him to find the knowledge he craves, and by helping him find resources which can provide necessary information. "Thinking out loud" with the gifted child can help him learn to make decisions, make evaluations, cope with frustration and overcome obstacles.

In addition to assisting the child in the development of his gifts and talents, parents can also encourage him to initiate his own activities. They can help him to develop self-control and the self-confidence necessary to complete the development of ideas and projects (Beck, 1967). It can be expected that the child who has developed some degree of independence and self-reliance will develop his capabilities more fully than the docile, dependent child. Being receptive to adult guidance when needed, along with the desire to take initiative and responsibility, is a combination of characteristics favorable to the development of giftedness (Strang, 1958).

Accurate self-appraisal is an essential aspect of the education and guidance of the gifted. According to Strang (1958, p. 73)

> "An individual's concept of himself and the degree to which he accepts that concept is important in self-realization. The way the individual sees himself and his world largely determines his behavior."

She further commented that parents can help the child discover and develop his potentialities, recognize his strengths and build on them, and accept certain weaknesses. Parents need to help the child develop a value system in which he can become a happily functioning person. One way the child can be helped to learn more about himself is by being shown how to keep a diary or journal of things he has seen, felt, or thought about.

Jacobs (1971) has reported that at the early level parents are capable of identifying their children's capabilities for superior performance. In order for them to be more effective nurturers of their children, they need certain kinds of information and interaction. Parents who recognize the signs of giftedness will be better able to recognize traits and abilities that are worth encouraging (Brumbaugh and Roshco, 1959). When parents are more aware of principles of educating gifted children, they are more likely to take or support action to meet the needs of the gifted child. For these reasons, the following program for parents of pre-school gifted was developed.

The parent group consisted of ten families who were self-nominated. All of the children about whom the parents expressed concern were first-borns. The ages of the children ranged from 3 to 6 and all were reading in varying degrees.

The philosophy of the program was based upon the notion that the education of the gifted child is more effectively realized when home, school, and community work together.

The SCORE board in Figure 1 was the basis for planning activities and making evaluations.

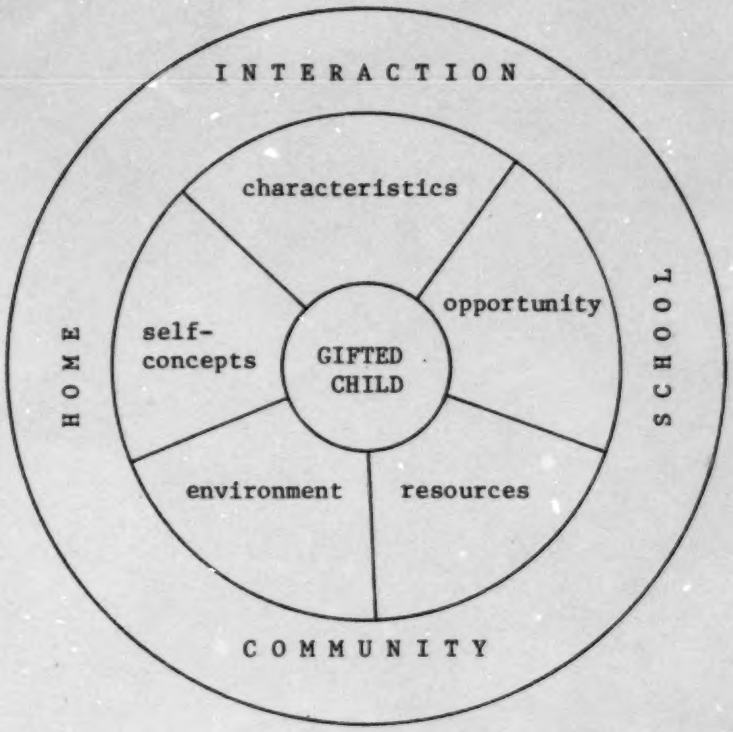

Figure 1

We selected to work directly with the home because of the nature of the relationship between parent and child, especially at the pre-school level. Parents were urged to work with the community and the school to provide programs and opportunities for the gifted child to use his special abilities. A close interaction between the three can also provide the support which is needed for each segment to be most efficient.

SELF-CONCEPTS

The most important component in the program was the development of self-concepts -- both in the parent and the child.

An attempt was made to give the parents the reassurance that they needed -- that they are capable of helping the gifted child by giving him the love and guidance that he needs to be socially and emotionally well-adjusted. The child's primary desire is for affection, approval, and assistance. This knowledge can help the parent develop the confidence to meet the other needs created by the child's giftedness (Brumbaugh and Roshco, 1959).

Discussions on how the gifted child can develop positive self-concepts about himself are important. If the child perceives himself as an able person with gifts to share he will tend to act accordingly (Strang, 1958).

CHARACTERISTICS

Through an understanding of the characteristics of a gifted child, the parents are better able to understand the child and relate to him in positive ways. Knowing what is "normal" in gifted children can often be comforting.

Models of thinking and creativity processes were introduced so that they could have a better understanding of the characteristic ways a child thinks at different stages in his development.

Parents were guided in examining their attitudes towards giftedness, their expectations, and their methods of relating to the child and working with him.

OPPORTUNITY

In a group setting, the opportunity is provided for parents to share

with others who have common needs and to introduce gifted pre-schoolers to other children of their chronological age with whom they can relate intellectually. In addition, meetings were planned to facilitate interaction with school personnel to better understand how the schools attempt to meet the gifted child's needs.

In order to assist the development of the child, the parents were urged to provide opportunities that would enable him to use his special abilities as they develop.

RESOURCES

Persons who could serve as resources included a first grade teacher, a kindergarten teacher, the director of the public school's gifted program, a specialist in early childhood education, and a school psychologist. Literature which could help the parents in understanding gifted children and that which suggested activities which they could use in working with their child were introduced.

The parents were also interested in knowing what community resources were available and how to use them in the best way to help in the development of the child and to stimulate him.

ENVIRONMENT

Parents were urged to take a closer look at the environment in which the child interacts to determine if it is conducive to meeting the child's emotional needs.

Activities were suggested that could encourage the child to become more aware of the environment in which he interacts in order that the child may become aware of gaps in information in self-knowledge and

concepts in general. This is a basis for their becoming creative problem finders and problem solvers.

The parents were urged to provide experiences whereby the child can view the world with wonder and open eyes.

It is imperative that every opportunity be made available to assist the gifted child in rising to his greatest fulfillment. One segment of our society alone cannot provide for all the needs of a gifted child. With interaction between home, school, and community, the gifted child's opportunities increase immeasurably.

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